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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the first venture of the author (a professor at Kentucky's Morehead State University) into the world of distance learning technology, specifically interactive television. Highlights include the one-way video classroom; multimedia development; compressed video classroom; and use of listservs. An informal evaluation of the semester yielded the following conclusions: (1) the support of the university has often lagged behind the needs of faculty and students; (2) the computers available in faculty offices do not have the capability to run Microsoft Power Point or multimedia clips that need sound cards; (3) there is no university-approved policy to equitably disseminate release time or stipends to distance learning faculty; and (4) the college's policy for fair use of copyrighted material is not yet in place because of the digitized nature of the compressed video system. There is also a list of practical tips for instructors who anticipate teaching telecourses, including: be prepared to visit sites at least once; sign up for 2-hour classes; work with the institutional bureaucracy to get release times and stipends; spend time playing with new software; and stop and give students time to share with each other their thoughts, feelings, and connections with material. (AEF)

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Egghead 1

Running Head: EGGHEAD

ED 398 870

Egghead and the TV Eye

Marium Williams

Morehead State University

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The Egg Head and The TV Eye

"The original Book The Egg and I was a true story of a "sophisticated" city woman's first venture into the country and raising chickens (MacDonald, 1945). This is the story of a country professors first venture into the "sophisticated" world of distance learning technology. Both stories reflect struggle, frustration and pain.

The Rationale for Distance Learning

Teaching a graduate course at Morehead State University (MSU) in Kentucky means traveling long distances on mountain roads. The math formula of distance, rate and time has in this environment, the factor of danger. Trucks are often overloaded with logs, fastened with rusty chains. Haulers of coal pepper the highways with bits of anthracite. These flying missiles may disable instantly cars and drivers. Blizzards and flash floods snatch cars from one's control. Morehead State University veteran faculty have a repertoire of horror tales of travel.

The Morehead State University instructional leadership program for Rank I and/or Education Specialist Degree qualifies students for principals, superintendents, and instructional supervisor certificates. Since the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act experienced school administrators have eschewed the rigors of reform by retiring. These retirements have created much pressure on MSU to produce new administrators quickly. The resources allocated to public school reform displaced some higher education funding. This downsizing of finances resulted in downsizing of faculty hirings. Like many other higher education entities today, the two MSU professors in educational administration were asked "to do more with less."

These forces of distance, danger, pressure to produce and dwindling resources were strong motivators for making educational administration courses available through technology. This is an account of one aging egghead's first year under the unrelenting TV eye.

The One-Way Video Classroom

The unrelenting eye of a TV camera is intimidating. The knowledge that there is a visual and auditory record of every action and word is even more frightening. The accusation of university colleagues that this form will lack rigor can be disheartening. But the cruelest barb is the lament from students that they would miss a personal teacher presence in the classroom. For an egghead instructor who has spent 25 years in front of live students, all of these are daunting. This media was particularly challenging because it employs one-way video and two-way audio. The camera eye meant that I must pay more attention to appearance. Neat hair; neutral and medium colors; jackets and vests to hide microphones; and swimmers wax to insure the earpiece stays in place are all new concerns of class preparation (Young, 1996). The concern for rigor mandated careful preparation. I provided outline notes to each site before each television presentation. Text options in computer programs prevented typing each slide's content again. More writings from students helped me understand their thinking. Planning the lecture content parallel to the text or handouts insured that students had a resource in hand. With the handouts and text, students could revisit information they may not have understood after the program. Some of the spontaneity of classroom interaction was necessarily sacrificed.

To make programs more personal, this instructor stopped often to ask students

questions that prompted discussion with colleagues at their site. Students wrote their reflections on questions that revealed their feelings, interpretations and integration of the concepts. These reflections were sent to the professor. These were anonymously shared with the whole television audience to show that student's thinking was valuable while preserving their privacy. Reflections and papers were sent back to the students frequently dotted with instructor comments to communicate more personally with students. At intervals, keypads (Keypads were available only through our one-way TV teaching.) were used to verify their understanding of content. E-mail was answered regularly to ensure that any questions a student asked got a timely answer. A performance task was assigned so every student was able to see the others at least once. These presentations gave students an opportunity to understand some of the trauma their instructor had felt. This strategy helped them better understand the challenge of TV teaching.

I Go Multi-Media

Media experts suggest a variety of visuals and sounds to keep students attention. Powerful presentation programs such as Power Point and Tool Book provide colorful slides. I did not keep a log of the hours of learning and production of my Power Point Presentations. Nor did I realize many of the hours of work that could be stolen by a computer virus, "the stoned empire monkey virus." My learning curve in grasping this part of technology was a roller coaster ride rife with frustration. But now I can make graphic slides easily and, with less ease, I can add music, animation and movies to my presentations.

In order for me to visit the one-way TV sites, I had to prepare in advance pre-taped classes. These films were to be aired while I was on the road. I spent many hours viewing

tapes and cuing them so our technical director could place them in proper sequence in my lecture. The first pre-taped lecture for this course in instructional supervision was "A Look into the Classroom. The second lecture was on "Building Teams", and the third was "Adult Developmental Theories". Here, short scenes from movies were used to illustrate or provide metaphor for the course's concepts. These scenes were followed by questions that asked students to link these "movie excerpts" to the theory and practice of educational administration. The students said they enjoyed these. Facilitators reported lively discussions followed these tapes and the reflections of the group. Facilitators indicated that students readily linked their experiences to these movie illustrations.

Despite the effort and preparation for this one-way video and two-way audio class, there were many obstacles that were not successfully hurdled. The two-way audio equipment worked infrequently. The keypads should have allowed each student to respond to a multiple-choice question. Their answers were to be relayed onto a bar graph on screen: these devices were not dependable. One hour of classtime was to be used in class discussion using the two-way audio system. This became almost impossible by the third or fourth class. This breakdown necessitated my giving each site discussion prompts, appointing rotating discussion leaders and asking for written feedback from those leaders each night. One other colleague was caught in this breakdown of equipment and like myself he had to prepare a back-up plan.

Morehead State University was preparing more updated interactive distance learning labs. They too were writing off this two-way audio--Octel extension of one-way video classrooms.

This first experience in distance learning had been very traumatic. I had never worked so hard and felt so unsuccessful. I have been thrown by the experience. Having been raised in horse country, I had spent much time stealing rides from neighbor,s horses, and I was often thrown. I knew the value of brushing oneself off and reaching for another ride. Therefore, I was one of Morehead State University's first faculty for the two-way video/two-way audio compressed-video distance learning semester.

Compressed Video Classroom

The two-way audio and two-way video venture is more interactive and satisfies the hunger to see "who is talking?" I entered this experience with more confidence of reaching students personally. My on-air time was expanded to two hours. My opportunity to influence students would be doubled. The equipment was new and had been pilot--tested by an elementary education department chair who enthusiastically supported its efficacy.

My hopes rose for an improvement on my last semester's experience. These hopes were somewhat confounded, however, by the realization that there was still another bit of technology to be mastered. From the huge lectern, I could control a panel that was touch sensitive to an electronic pen. (see illustration, V. Tel, 1995). In one area, I had the choice of three cameras. Camera three focused on the computer and/or document camera. Small buttons on the camera enabled the user to choose a slide on the computer or a resource laid under the document camera. This visualizer could show a calculator, a bowl of fruit or a book etc. I could pick up a marker and use a blue pad (white paper creates a glare) to convey notations I would normally write on a blackboard.

Under the area for camera selection were directions keys that control the camera

focused on the classroom. Zoom options enable me or a facilitator to get a close up of students. I finally had the capability of seeing my students more personally. I could simply ask a facilitator at a site to zoom in on a student. An area to the right of the camera control allowed me or a facilitator to mute this site or increase volume. There were other controls and options, but these were the main controls that I used. This lectern and controls were replicated at each site.

I visited each of the five distance learning sites during the semester. Students were always glad to see the person rather than the TV screen in front of them. I did notice however, students watching the TV monitor while I was visiting in person. Perhaps they were making sure it was really me. Interactive conversations with distant sites did increase after these personal visits. For this reason, next fall, these visits will come first on my schedule to make more personal the TV image students must confront weekly.

The format of my lectures was similar to my one-way video semester. Whenever I gave group discussions or personal reflection time, I was now able to get immediate feedback from each site and even monitor group discussions by asking the facilitator at a site to switch the volume control "off mute."

Usually facilitators kept their sites on mute because microphones sometimes caught sounds that distracted class. Otherwise, the sound activated camera reacting to a noise might instantly show a student picking up a fallen book. I am not sure I prefer the other sites on mute because a student's question or response is sometimes delayed because they must signal to the facilitator that they want to speak. There is the added problem of not knowing what is going on at sites when they are on mute. It is entirely possible they are all on a spontaneous

break.

Contact with all the sites is important. To insure that I was not leaving any out, I kept a list of sites and students names to insure that I rotate their opportunities to respond fairly. This process of calling on sites and getting a response required more wait time than in a normal class but this was necessary to get class participation.

The spring semester two-way video gave my class the opportunity to interact with principals from communities far from the university. The principals in these far sites were given an opportunity to see for themselves the capability of distance learning centers. Two of the five sites I visited were in high schools. This two-way benefit to students and practicing principals will open opportunities to students in isolated areas in these eastern Kentucky mountains.

In looking back at this spring semester I felt somewhat more satisfied with this distance learning experience. I was able to see and hear my students more effectively. I still felt guilty that I hadn't covered the content that I usually covered in the face-to-face classroom. The problem of getting materials to each site was a matter of disciplining myself to be at least a week ahead in my preparation. I also tried to communicate with the facilitators often by voice mail, E-mail, and faxes. Most were very helpful in copying and disseminating materials at each site. On one occasion, they helped facilitate student productions at their sites. The performance task for the Supervision of Instruction course was an assignment to produce a short video that might be used for staff development at the "awareness of innovation stage." These eight to ten minute videos were produced at the site and sent to me as an assignment. These also were reviewed by class participants and

evaluated first by the site of origin then others were asked for ways they might have done it differently. Several facilitators gave this project high ratings because of creativity and team work they saw generated. These facilitators also helped train site participants in E-mail and the use of software packages. They were trained with faculty so we all had some knowledge of each other's distance learning skills.

During more recent distance learning training, new software packages for multi-media application such as Compell and 3 DFX were made available for faculty and facilitators to try. Instruction and time were given to ensure distance learning faculty understood E-mailing applications for class such as List-servs. Instructions were given and time to practice attaching documents by E-mail. This will make easier the task of getting assignments to students. I was encouraged to find these List- serv addresses for my educational administration students and list them here as sources for others interested in educational administration. I understand however, that a List serve can be a burden because of the volume of responses.

List Serv
K 12 ADMIN
Discussion of educ.administrators
listserv@sumv.syr.edu.

ADMIN. Educational
Administration Discussion
listproc@bgu.edu.

AERA-A Educational
Administration Forum
AERA listserv@asu.edu.

EDAD-L Educational Administration Discussion
listserv@wvnm.wvnet.edu.

Informal Evaluation of Semester

In communicating by brief surveys, with others who participated in distance learning after this first semester, other MSU faculty several expressed concerns. My experience validated these concerns.

- 1.) The support of the university has often lagged behind the needs of the faculty and students. In the E-mail system, there are several different telecommunications software packages at the sites, so students and professors have to deal with multiple procedures
- 2.) The computers available in faculty offices do not have the capability to run Power Point or multi-media clips that need sound cards. Yet we are asked to use as much creativity as possible in preparing classes.
- 3.) There is no university approved policy for compensation to faculty to equitably disseminate release time or stipends to distance learning faculty. These policies are beginning to emerge.
- 4.) The MSU policy for fair use of copyrighted material is not yet in place because of the digitized nature of the compressed video system. By digitizing pictures, the capacity to change and manipulate images has fostered many concerns that may make use of multi-media images very restrictive.

The other members of these pioneer distance learning teams were all appreciative of the support and dedication of the distance learning support team. They have applauded the training and the personnel. Questions were answered in a timely manner. Help in learning software applications was readily available. The distance learning support team would come to individual offices or faculty had keys to the university distance learning classroom to

access computers. The classroom itself was newly appointed with new desks, carpet, drapes and computers with memory capable of multi-media production. Other resources on campus at the library and in the multi-media center were networked with distance learning faculty so if faculty had an innovative idea, assistance was available.

This adventure into a new media continues for me next year. Most of the distance learning faculty who are willing to try again indicated they began because they liked to "try new things." They also stated they wanted to be resources for those who will come after them. This sort of "adventure-pioneer" will continue to provide distance learning classes. There are however some caveats.

1. Be prepared to visit sites at least once. This helps students relate to the TV image.
2. Sign up for two-hour classes. The process of contacting every site slows the class down so providing a meaningful class for several sites requires two hours.
3. Work with the institutional bureaucracy to get release time and stipends. Preparation, training and learning take much time.
4. Keep learning. My next learning is to focus on more efficient use of E-mail and the World Wide Web. The possibilities of conversations and research across the world are ones I want to open for students.
5. Spend time playing with new software. Video clips, sound and animation are possibilities for enriching classrooms.

6. Technology can get in the way of reaching the students personally. Stop and give students time to share with each other their thoughts, feelings and connections with material.

Television classes are a challenging media. Techniques for stimulating thinking need to be assimilated from many sources. Seeking feedback from students, help from technical support, and seeking support from the administration are tasks that come with this territory. Television teachers need to be on the alert for ways to motivate the students. How to best span this psychological distance is the challenge. Effective teachers need to reach their students' thoughts, not just their senses. The main goal is to personalize and make active an experience that could be a passive, impersonal one. The instructor should not be a "*talking egghead*" that students will want to turn off cognitively as they literally turn off the TV.

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SLIDES

Up
SELECT
Down

Select Slide

Delete Slide

Clear List

PRESENT

Next

Prev

AUDIO

+
Volume
-

Mute

PHONE CALL

Connect

Hangup

MENU

Up

Select

Down

Clear

VIDEO CALL

Connect

Hangup

PREVIEW

1

2

3

4 VCR

PC

Send

Save

DRAW AREA

Slide

CAMERA CONTROL

LOCAL

1

2

3

4 VCR

REMOTE

1

2

3

4 VCR

MOVE

Store

LOCAL PRESETS

A B C D

REMOTE PRESETS

A B C D

Zoom In

Zoom Out

Open IRIS

Close IRIS

Focus In

Focus Out



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